

***The Institution of Engineers, Australia; Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee***

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

**Gordon MESSITER (1936 -)
Electrical and Traffic Engineer**

Birth and Family: Born 28th September 1936 in Auburn, Sydney. He is the fourth of eight children in an extremely poor family. They moved to a 'bush humpy' in Kirrawee from Sydney because of financial problems. His father was a brickie's labourer prior to the war and worked on the wharves afterwards. His mother was of Irish background, a "Carmody".

Schooling: Primary school – Sutherland Public School (1941 – 1947).
Secondary school – Sydney Technical High School (1948 – 1951). A selective school in Albion Street, Paddington. He left school half way through fourth year to assist his family financially.

Qualifications: 1956 – Technical Certificate, Wagga Technical College.
1957 – Qualifying and Matriculation Certificates.
1966 – B Sc (Tech) in Electrical Engineering at University of New South Wales.
1971 – M. Eng. Sc in Traffic and Transport at University of New South Wales.

Work History: After leaving school early Gordon began to work as a junior with the Department of Road Transport and Tramways. After the tram network was closed down he was transferred to the Randwick Bus Depot as a junior cleaner. He was called up for National Service in 1956 which he served in Wagga Wagga, also completing his Trade Certificate at Wagga Technological College by studying Aircraft Engineering.

In 1957 he began an apprenticeship as an electrical fitter and mechanic at the Garden Island Dockyard. When this was completed he was employed as a draftsman in the Electrical Drawing Office. He completed his secondary education via night classes at the Technical College, gaining both his Leaving and Matriculation Certificates in 1957. He then enrolled in a Diploma in Engineering at Sydney Technical College.

Gordon married Beverley in 1960 and due to the expectation of their first child he took on a new job in 1961 at the Electricity Commission of New South Wales as a draftsman working on the power stations at Vales Point, Munmorah and Liddell (this job provided the higher salary that was necessary for the new family.) He was concurrently

studying for a B.Sc (Tech) in electrical engineering at the University of New South Wales which he completed in 1966. In 1967 he moved to the Department of Motor Transport to become a Traffic Engineer as he was not offered an engineering position upon graduation in the Electricity Commission.

From 1967 – 1971 he was enrolled in M. Eng Sc in traffic and transport at the University of New South Wales and in 1969 he assisted in the set up of the Traffic Accident Research Unit. He was appointed head of the traffic accident analysis and research division. Research completed through this body led to the introduction of compulsory seat belt laws and breathalyser tests of drivers.

In 1973 he underwent a massive job change, moving down to Canberra to be employed initially by the Department of Capital Territory and later by the Commonwealth Department of Transport. During this time he worked on various projects such as public transport, road development, the National Highway system and the Australian Passenger Train.

In 1975 he returned to Sydney to take up the position of Head of Transport Planning and Policy in the New South Wales Ministry of Transport and Highways. He succeeded Ken Trott (his boss) as Secretary and Department Head of the, then, Ministry of Transport during which time major changes were achieved in the restructuring of transport legislation, authorities, policies and strategic planning. In 1986 he was invited by the Minister for Health to become the Secretary and Department Head of the Health Department and to undertake a major restructure of health and hospital administration, the legislative framework and financial administration of health in New South Wales. The following year saw him as the Premier appointed Secretary and Secretary Designate of the Premier's Department. After the change of government in 1988, Gordon was transferred to establish a new Department of Administrative Services.

In 1995, following another change of government, he was appointed Acting Chief Executive of the State Rail Authority with the mission of preparing the Authority for the Hilmer competition policy reforms which would separate its functions. He left this position at the end of the same year to become Chairman of the Electricity Reform Steering Committee where his job was to co-ordinate reforms in the electricity industry, to implement the Hilmer competition policy reforms and to assist to establish the State and National electricity markets.

Gordon became General Manager to Randwick Council in 1996 which is his current position as of April 1999.

Prepared by Patricia Taaffe, July 2002 from oral history interviews conducted on
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